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ABSTRACT

Home schooling, the educational alternative in which parents (or guardians) assume the primary responsibility for the education of their children, when responsibly done, is legally protected by the United States Constitution; however, home educators face a conglomeration of regulations, statutes, and laws. Home schools are regulated by individual states by using existing laws that apply to home schooling, by passing specific home schooling legislation, and by passing legislation that indirectly affects home schooling. As parents cope with the responsibility of providing most of their childrens' education, they may feel the need for some support. A key form of support is available within support group membership. Additionally, because each state has its own set of statutes and laws, the support group may also function as both a repository for, and dispenser of, home-schooling information. Available to parent teachers are structured curricula, subject area studies, and games and equipment. The cost of these materials is nearly always borne by the parents, and the expense can range from under a hundred to several hundred dollars. The suitability of educational materials is at times determined by the child's needs, by the circumstances of parents, and by state requirements. (37 references) (KM)

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HOME SCHOOLING, WHAT'S THAT?

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Home Schooling Defined

Home schooling is the educational alternative in which parents/guardians assume the primary responsibility for the education of their children.

Home Schooling and the Law

Home schooling is regulated legally in three ways:

1. By applying existing laws to home schooling.

2. By passing specific home-schooling legislation.

3. By passing education measures indirectly impacting home schooling.

Home-Schooling Organizations

Support groups for home schoolers may comprise

1. National and international operations.

2. State-wide associations.

3. Regional and local groupings.

Educational Resources

1. Types include structured curricula, subject area studies, and games and equipment.

2. Costs can range from under a hundred to several hundred dollars.

3. Suitability is at times determined by needs of child, circumstances of parents, and state requirements.

Home-Schooling Research

Research on and about home schooling includes:

1. Quantitative research, which is number oriented.

2. Qualitative research, which is people oriented.

On the state level, obtaining accurate numbers of children being home schooled is almost impossible. Estimates available include 3,000 in Alabama (Rakestraw, 1988) and 12,000 families in Texas (McCord & McCord, 1988). Arkansas is one of several states which require yearly testing, and 1,225 home-schooled students were tested in April of 1989 (Department of Education). In June of 1989 Dr. Lynda Hawkins, Home School Program Support Manager for the Arkansas Department of Education, estimated that perhaps 2,000 children will be home schooled in Arkansas during the 1989/1990 school year (personal communication).

Questions asked concerning home schooling include: 1. Is home schooling really legal? 2. How do parents handle the responsibility? 3. What educational resources are available to parent teachers? and 4. How is home-schooling research conducted? In this study these questions will be answered, but it will soon become apparent that the answers will bring forth many more questions. Because home schooling contains so many diverse and changing factors, each family situation is unique. Yet there exists within the home schooling community a sense of unity which transcends ideological, political, and religious concerns. That unity lies in the parents' commitment to the education of their children, whose welfare is their primary concern.

Introduction

Home schooling may be defined as that educational alternative in which parents/guardians assume the primary responsibility for the education of their children. In the second edition of What Works: Research about Teaching and Learning, the importance of parents as "their children's first and most influential teachers" is reaffirmed (1987). This past February at the National Association of Secondary School Principals the topic of parental involvement was discussed. The 32 principals who fielded questions on the Gannett/USA TODAY Education Hotline received a number of questions concerning parental involvement. One of the questions dealt with the issue of home schooling, and the answer was: "Home schooling is a viable alternative if done for the right reasons ("High School Principals", 1989).

Given the reality of home schooling, the question arises: How many children are actually being taught at home? According to Patricia Lines, a policy analyst with the U.S. Department of Education, "tens of thousands--perhaps hundreds of thousands--of children are meeting state compulsory education requirements at home rather than at school" (1987). Raymond and Dorothy Moore have been involved in the home-schooling movement for many years. In their latest book, Home School Burnout, they state their belief that "the total number of children schooled at home most of each day is well over a million" (1988).

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Home Schooling and the Law

The answer to the question as to whether or not home schooling is really legal is yes; "Home schooling, when it is responsibly done, is legally protected by the Constitution of the United States in all 50 states" (Home School Legal Defense Association). Of all the issues associated with home schooling, the legal aspect is perhaps the most complicated and confusing. Home educators face a conglomeration of regulations, statutes, and laws.

Home schools are regulated by the individual states in three basic ways: 1. by using existing laws to apply to home schooling 2. by passing specific home-school legislation and, 3. by passing legislation which indirectly impacts home schooling.

Alabama is one state which applies existing laws to cover home schooling. According to Joe H. Miller, Coordinator of Private Schools Licensure for the Alabama Department of Education, the Private Tutor Law is the law that governs home schooling in Alabama (personal communication, August 23, 1988). This law was passed in 1940 and stipulates that the person providing the home instruction must be certified in the state of Alabama. However, James Hart, the president of the Alabama Home Educators, believes that the majority of home schoolers in Alabama choose to be affiliated with a church school (personal communication, March 20, 1989). Church schools

are exempt from the certification requirement (Church School Exemption). Although efforts have been made to change the Private Tutor Law, there has been little legislative incentive to change it (J. H. Miller, personal communication, September 8, 1988).

Arkansas is one state which has passed specific home-school legislation. The Home School Law was passed in 1985, and was revised in 1987. The law has two fundamental requirements. First, parents must file a letter of intent with their local school districts by August 15 to begin home schooling in September, or by December 15 to begin in January. Second, home-schooled children seven and over are required to be tested yearly (Preiss, 1989).

North Dakota passed a home schooling law recently. This passage was considered a victory for home schoolers, for North Dakota has been one of three states which require that home educators be certified. During the 1988-1989 school year the HSLDA had more cases in court in North Dakota than the rest of the country combined. The new law provides for non-certified parents to either be supervised by a certified teacher or to pass the ND state teachers' examination. Parents who pass the teachers' exam are exempt from supervision and monitoring by a certified teacher (Governor Signs, 1989).

Sometimes states attempt to deal with such problems as lack of readiness for school or truancy by passing legislation. Arkansas passed a mandatory kindergarten bill this past March. This bill

lowers the compulsory school age from 7 to 5. Parents must now either file letters of intent for five and six-year-olds or file waivers indicating they do not want their children to attend kindergarten (Holiman, 1989). Oklahoma passed HB 1539 during the 1989 legislative session. The basic intent of the law appears to be to get truant children off the streets and in school. However, there is the possibility that home-schooled children out during school hours without an adult could be detained by an attendance officer. Home educators are encouraged to make sure they provide the guidance necessary to ensure that such circumstances do not occur (New Law, 1989).

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Home-Schooling Organizations

As parents cope with the responsibility of providing most of their children's education, they find the need for support, and support is available. It is available in many forms, and one key form is support groups. Geographically support groups may be divided into three realms: national/international operations, state-wide associations, and regional and local groups.

On the national/international levels are the Moore Foundation and Holt Associates. On the state level are such organizations as AHE (Alabama Home Educators) and FHE (Families for Home Education), which is Missouri based. The Northeast Louisiana Homeschool Association could fall into the regional category while EELR (Educational Experiences of Little Rock), might be considered a local group.

The recently activated Moore Foundation, under the direction of Dorothy and Raymond Moore, publishes a newsletter, The Moore Report (News Release, 1989). The Moores' involvement in home schooling has spanned many years, and now they conduct seminars and serve as consultants both in the United States and abroad (International, 1989).

Holt Associates, the organization founded by the late John Holt, reflects his philosophy regarding children and how they learn. The November, 1989 issue of Parents magazine contains an article, "Learning All the Time", which

was written by John Holt shortly before his death. The newsletter of Holt Associates is Growing Without Schooling, and its subscribers come from a majority of the states as well as from Canada, Great Britain, Australia, Japan, and Austria (Additions to, 1989).

Because each state has its own set of statutes and laws, the state support group functions as both a repository for, and dispenser of, home-schooling information. State-wide support groups at times serve as lobbying groups (Support groups, 1988). One way the state organizations inform is through newsletters. FHE (Families for Home Education), the Missouri group, offers its members a monthly magazine, regional support group news, state book fairs and conventions, and legislative support (Show me success, 1989). The AHE (Alabama Home Educators) "is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization founded in 1984 to support parents desiring to educate their children at home" (AHE brochure).

The Northeast Louisiana Homeschool Association, located in the Monroe-West Monroe area, publishes a newsletter, plans and schedules field trips, and informs members of upcoming seminars and book fairs (Report on seminars, 1989). "Educational Experiences in Little Rock, a support group of parents who participate in the Home School Program, sponsors trips to places like the Arkansas Territorial Restoration, the Arkansas Arts Center, and area parks" (Jordan, 1989).

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Educational Resources

As home educators endeavor to provide learning opportunities for their children, they are faced with a plethora of choices. In one home-schooling catalog alone over 300 suppliers of home-schooling materials are listed (Pride, 1987). Available to parent teachers are structured curricula, subject area studies, and games and equipment.

Calvert School, in business as a correspondence school since 1906, has had through the years more than 350,000 students enrolled in their home instruction courses (Calvert School). Kumon Mathematics, one of many math curricula available to home educators, is a method whereby a child progresses at his/her own rate. An interesting feature of the program is the requirement that in order to advance to a higher level, a student must exhibit 100% mastery (What is, 1987). Kumon Math is being used on an experimental basis in some public schools. Sumiton Elementary School in rural Alabama (near Birmingham), began using Kumon in the fall of 1988 (Murr, 1989). Learning at Home, a Hawaii based company, lists in their catalog a variety of educational equipment and games. The items offered range from a portable planetarium to wooden dinosaur kits (Learning at Home).

The cost of materials is nearly always borne by the parents, and the expense can range from under a hundred to several hundred dollars. A year's reading program (first

grade) may be purchased from a Mennonite publisher for under a hundred dollars (Rod & Staff, 1988). A Beka offers Video Home School for $740 a year per child (Home Schooling, 1989-90).

Parents who choose to home school have the responsibility of deciding which materials they consider suitable for their children. The needs of the child at times take precedence over other considerations. One parent, after realizing that a highly structured curriculum was becoming a burden to her first grader, stopped using it (Personal communication, C.M., October, 1989). She is now teaching to her child's interests rather than teaching a set curriculum. The circumstances of families sometimes influence the choice of materials. Shackelford and White recommend very structured curricula for parents who are not well-educated or who were educated in another country (1988). Some states, among them Tennessee, require that certain subjects be taught in all schools: public, private, or home. According to Tennessee statute, students should learn about Tennessee's history and her constitution as well as about U.S. history and her constitution (Klicka, 1989).

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Home-Schooling Research

Home-schooling research includes both quantitative (number-oriented) and qualitative (people-oriented) studies. John Wesley Taylor, who was home schooled himself, wrote a dissertation in 1986 entitled Self-Concept in Home-Schooling Children. A Study of Home-Schooling in Missouri, by Richard Reavis, was completed in 1988. Studies employing the naturalistic approach include those being done by Gary Knowles in Utah and Jane Preiss in Arkansas.

Taylor utilized the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale to compare the self-concept of home-schooled children with those of conventionally schooled children. One rationale for his study was the concern so often raised by parents, educators, and the judicial system. The concern is that children being home schooled are socially deprived. From the analysis of his data, he concluded that: "Insofar as self-concept is a reflector of socialization, it would appear that few home-schooling children are socially deprived" (Taylor, 1986).

The purpose of the study by Reavis was "to ascertain and report current attitudes of public school superintendents regarding the problems associated with home-schooling in Missouri" (1988). He utilized and adapted the scale used by Michael Lindley in his study of home schooling in Indiana. Dr. Reavis mailed out 460 questionnaires to Missouri superintendents and 327, or 71.09%, were returned. The questionnaires each contained 25 questions to which the

superintendents were to indicate responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" (Reavis, 1988).

J. Gary Knowles, in an article in Urban Education, described ideas to encourage cooperation between home educators and public schools. His ideas emerged from his two-year ethnographic study of home schools in Utah. Participant observation was his primary method for understanding home schoolers, but he utilized other evidence such as interviews, life-history accounts, and journals. One of his concluding statements was: "Central to the idea of accommodating and cooperating with home school parents is the need to overcome stereotypes and a willingness to work with people who think differently about education" (Knowles, 1989).

Jane Preiss's continuing ethnographic studies of home schooling in Little Rock, Arkansas began in 1987. Her research has involved observing home schools in session (Preiss, 1987), interviews, substituting in a home school, and counseling home educators. She is the director of an experimental program for home schoolers called CHURCH (Church Helping Utilize Resources of the Church and Home). The purpose of CHURCH is "to offer to home-schooling families a program based upon the belief that all children are gifted in one way or another. Multi-age activities will give each child the opportunity to explore and learn in a natural and productive way. Organization and scheduling will reflect the conviction that all of us are both learners and teachers" (New program, 1989).

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